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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000364

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2023

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: POLLSTERS DIFFER WIDELY ON SIZE OF MA'S LEAD

REF: 2007 TAIPEI 00769

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,  
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Although there seems to be as much art as science in current Taiwan polling, some surveys show KMT candidate Ma Ying-jeou winning handily by 20 or more points. On the other hand, DPP candidate Frank Hsieh campaign's internal polling now shows the gap at less than 6 points. KMT officials have also recently suggested Ma's lead is only 8-10 points. Some political observers and contacts of AIT, however, believe both parties may be portraying the race as close in hopes of mobilizing their supporters to turn out on election day. Other media polls, which generally have flaws, all give Ma a wide lead. One caveat: Two Hsieh lines of attack on Ma have come to the fore recently -- "one China market" and "one party dominance" -- and they appear to be resonating with some voters in ways which should continue affecting polling numbers. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Note: As in 2004, Taiwan's legal ban on the release or publication of public opinion polls went into effect on March 12, ten days ahead of the election. Some polling centers will continue polling but are barred from releasing the results publicly. End Note.

Some Polls Show Ma Maintaining Significant Lead Over Hsieh  
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¶3. (C) Global Views Monthly (GVM) Polling Center Director Tai Li-an, who is one of Taiwan's leading pollsters and has KMT connections, told AIT that Ma's lead over Hsieh has remained relatively stable over the past six months, averaging about 20 points, according to his monthly tracking poll. Tai said his center is now conducting a daily tracking poll, which on March 12 showed support for Ma at 49 percent and Hsieh 28 percent, with 19 percent undecided. Most of the undecideds will not vote, Tai predicted. After allocating the undecideds who are likely to vote and taking into account the expected turnout rate (75-76 percent), Tai's tracking poll shows Ma leading on March 13 by 26 points, 63-37, the gap widening from 57-43 (14 points) on February 28.

¶4. (C) Based on the current situation and a 75-76 percent turnout rate, Tai predicted that Ma will probably win 60-64 percent of the votes on March 22, while Hsieh is likely to

win 36-40 percent of the votes. Tai expects the election to tighten somewhat in the final week, and in a worst case scenario for Ma, the gap could close to 10 points. However, Tai thinks this is unlikely and believes only a major incident could change the election dynamics. In explaining why this race is not as close as 2004, Tai said that his analysis of voting patterns over the past four years reveals a shift in base support for the two parties. While the Blue-Green split in 2004 was 55-45, this gap has now expanded to 60-40, Tai said.

15. (C) On the Blue side, Tai attributes this shift in base support to Ma Ying-jeou's taking over leadership of the KMT. Tai pointed to his polling which indicates that public support for the KMT rose from the 20s to the 30s over a period of months after Ma's election as party chairman and has remained at this higher level ever since. On the Green side, the DPP has been damaged by a series of developments since 2004, including corruption scandals surrounding President Chen and the public perception of poor performance by the DPP government. In discussing differences between this election and 2004, Tai noted that President Chen was able to gradually close a wide gap with KMT candidate Lien Chan over a long period of time, but the margin between Ma and Hsieh has remained relatively stable for more than half a year.

16. (C) Apple Daily has published the results of several polls conducted by the relatively well-respected National Sun Yat-sen University (NSYU) polling center. According to their latest poll on March 10, support for Ma is at 41 percent and Hsieh 20 percent, with 39 percent undecided. Using indirect questions to determine the inclinations of undecided voters,

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NYSU projects Ma is likely to win 56 percent of the vote compared to 44 percent for Hsieh. Tai Li-an suggested that some of the parameters being used by NYSU and other polling centers might not adequately take into account the changes since 2004 in the balance of support for the two major parties.

#### Internal Party Polls Suggest a Closer Race

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17. (C) Both the DPP and KMT conduct internal polling for campaign planning but generally keep the results confidential. Such polling is believed to be relatively

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reliable, especially compared to most media polling. Recently, KMT spokesman Su Chun-ping said on a talk show that his party's polling showed the gap between Ma and Hsieh running about 14-20 points, while other KMT officials have said the gap was 8 or 10 points. Su suggested that a comment by KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung that the gap was just 10 points was probably Wu's realistic evaluation of the actual margin, based on his long experience of dealing with campaigns and polling. Tai Li-an told AIT the 10 point figure quoted in the media actually came from a special internal KMT poll whose questions were specially designed to show the worst-case results for Ma in the presidential election. Some KMT contacts believe the party is taking extra care not to portray Ma's lead as overly wide, fearing that overconfidence could lead to low turnout by KMT voters.

18. (C) TECRO Council Member Corey Chen, a close advisor to Frank Hsieh, told AIT on March 13 that the Hsieh campaign's recent polling showed Ma Ying-jeou with a lead just under 6 points. This does not include the 20 percent undecided voters, the majority of whom he expects to support Hsieh. Although allocating the undecided voters produced a very slight lead for Hsieh, Chen said he was not fully confident of the parameters being used in the polling calculations. Chen expects the election results to be quite close, with the margin between the candidates about 1-3 percent, and he

believes Hsieh has a 50-50 chance of winning the election. Chen also noted that Hsieh, based on previous experience, is confident he can win a come-from-behind victory if the polling gap is under 10 points. DPP leaders close to Hsieh, including campaign director Yeh Chu-lan and campaign manager Lee Ying-yuan, have told AIT they are optimistic about Hsieh's chances, but other lower level party officials have told us they think Hsieh will have a hard time winning and the gap is wider than the Hsieh campaign's figures indicate. (Note: Lee Ying-yuan seemed particularly optimistic in a meeting with AIT on March 13, after the melee at the DPP headquarters the night before. He said he's always told his campaign staff that Hsieh would win, and suggested that he now feels even more justified of his views.)

#### Pro-Blue Media Polls Project Ma Winning....

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¶9. (C) Three pro-Blue media outlets, TVBS, United Daily News, and China Times, have each published a series of polls, all of which show Ma with a wide lead. Although such polls can provide a useful reference and reveal broad trends, they do not have a good track record and have often proved at variance with actual election results (reftel). While all polling in Taiwan undercounts DPP supporters, polls by the pro-Blue media are worse than average in this regard because "institutional bias" makes DPP supporters more reluctant to respond or express a clear preference. Experts add that many of these media polls, moreover, suffer from other technical weaknesses, such as poorly designed questions, non-professional survey staff, inadequate weighting of sample data and a very high percentage of people in the "undecided" or "refuse to answer" categories. Pro-DPP media outlets have not published any polling for the upcoming presidential election.

¶10. (C) The last poll conducted by UDN on March 10 puts Ma ahead 52 to 22 percent, with 26 percent undecided. The 30 percent gap is down 7 percentage points from the UDN's previous poll on March 1. Based on the polling numbers from its March 1 survey, the UDN projected that on election day Ma

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would win 57 percent of the vote and Hsieh 43 percent. A March 10 TVBS poll put support for Ma at 53 percent and Hsieh 29 percent, with 18 percent undecided. After allocating undecided voters, TVBS estimates Ma will win 57 percent of the vote compared to 43 percent for Hsieh.

#### ...But Suffer from Credibility Problems

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¶11. (C) This election marks the first time that pro-Blue media polls have tried to allocate undecided voters in order to make election predictions. Taipanned these efforts as largely "guesswork" based more on the pollsters' gut feelings than the statistics they had collected. Tai Li-an told AIT that cross-tabulations of TVBS polls, for example, show a wide discrepancy in the percentage of respondents identified as DPP and KMT supporters from poll to poll. Tai explained that the "base" of support for either party as a percentage of the whole population is fairly constant and only shifts gradually over time. That TVBS numbers fluctuate widely suggests there are problems with how the polls are weighted to try to capture a fuller representation of the society at large.

¶12. (C) National Chengchi University Election Study Center Director Yu Ching-hsin told AIT that the quality of media polling on Taiwan has deteriorated over the last few election cycles. Refusal or non-response rates have risen to as high as 30-40 percent, suggesting the media are only reaching a self-selecting group within the general population. Yu added that increased media partisanship has led to a loss of credibility that reinforces the "institutional bias" of the polls they conduct. Yu characterized the recent election

predictions rolled out by the media as "pure magic" because the pollsters have not disclosed their methodologies, which appear to be based more on "gut feeling" than statistics. Yu acknowledged to AIT that Tai Li-an's statistical analysis is rigorous, but he questioned whether Tai or others invest sufficient time and resources into their surveys.

Comment

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¶13. (C) Most pollsters and political observers think Ma has a significant lead over Hsieh heading into the campaign's final week. Some believe the gap between the two is too wide to close, barring a major unexpected incident. However, others see the race as much closer, and the Hsieh campaign in particular seems to think it can overtake the KMT at the end, just as the DPP has done in a number of previous elections. The incident at Hsieh's headquarters a couple of nights ago and subsequent fall-out has encouraged this expectation of a DPP comeback.

YOUNG